

House drops proposed 30th minority district from remap

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The Louisiana House eliminated a proposed 30th majority black House district on Monday, action that protects the seats of two incumbent Republican representatives.

After a spirited debate and threats of lawsuits that could block required federal approval, the House voted 57-46 to strip the remap plan of a Shreveport majority black district, which had been added by its redistricting committee.

The House returns Tuesday to complete debate and vote on House Bill 1, the legislation that redraws election district lines for all 105 state representatives.

House Republican legislative delegation chair state Rep. Jane Smith of Bossier City called in Gov. Bobby Jindal's office to get involved.

"They came down and talked about the fact that Republicans need to make sure we don't dilute our vote either," Smith said.

Creation of the new black district would have required Republican state Reps. Alan Seabaugh, of Shreveport, and Richie Burford, of Stonewall, to run against one another.

The newly elected Seabaugh was sworn into the Legislature in time to participate in the redistricting session.

Two Republicans and a no-party lawmaker had joined with Democrats to get the 30th seat out of committee.

Democratic leaders warned that elimination of the Shreveport district would lead to U.S. Justice Department rejecting the House redistricting plan because a district where black voters could have a "effective" influence could be drawn.

Legislative Black Caucus Chairwoman and state Rep. Pat

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Smith added: "You will be going to court. That is an assurance."

Smith, D-Baton Rouge, said HB1's remap plan — with 30 black majority districts — is a far cry from drawing the maximum number of black majority districts. She said the state's population, which is one-third black, means 33 districts should be black majority.

As debate began Monday, House Speaker Jim Tucker said he believes the plan he outlined in HB1 would meet Justice Department scrutiny because of "adequate compliance" to the federal Voting Rights Act, which bans dilution of minority voter influence.

"It contains a fair representation of where we are as a state, that works to ensure that all of our constituents are admirably represented," said Tucker, R-Terrytown.

The plan redraws House districts to align them with population shifts since the 2000 U.S. census. Districts must be fairly equal in population to comply with federal law.

Besides eliminating the 30th majority black seat, the House approved a change that would stop two Democrats from running against each other in a central Louisiana district but put two Republicans in the same spot.

State Rep. Chris Roy, D-Alexandria, reminded the House of the governor's request that lawmakers "not deal in partisan politics" as he offered an amendment that would put two Republican lawmakers in the same district.

"I hope that is still the governor's message. I hope you ad-



Advocate staff photo by BILL FEIG

State Rep. Chris Roy, D-Alexandria, at microphone, explained Monday his proposal to keep three state House seats in Rapides Parish as the House took up legislation redrawing election district lines. Roy argued he should not be put in a district with fellow state Rep. James Armes, D-Leesville. The House approved the change over the objection of House Speaker Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown, second from right, lead sponsor of House Bill 1. At far right is House senior legislative analyst Patricia Lowrey-Dufour. A proposal to undo the change is up for consideration Tuesday.

here to it. I ask you to vote for this amendment," Roy said.

Roy got his way on a 51-48 vote, but a move surfaced later in the day to undo it. It is pending House action Tuesday.

Most of the debate Monday surrounded Seabaugh's amendment to eliminate the 30th majority black district in Shreveport. Seabaugh would have to face fellow Republican Burford under the HB1 plan that would add that seat.

Seabaugh said the drawing of the 30th majority black district may violate the U.S. Constitution's "equal protection" clause because it discriminates against non-minorities.

Caddo Parish is about 50 percent white and 50 percent black. It should have three white districts and three black ones — not two white and four black ones as proposed, Seabaugh said.

"The Voting Rights Act does not only protect minorities," he said.

State Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, said the House would be inviting a U.S. Justice Department challenge if it eliminated the Shreveport district.

"We can do the popular thing and send this bill out without this additional district. That would be an easy vote. This is an election year," Gallot said. "But if we pass this bill without that district in it, I can guarantee you we won't be pre-cleared."

Democratic state Rep. Barbara Norton, of Shreveport, supported Seabaugh, saying her district, which is 80 percent-plus black, could be put at risk under HB1's initial plan. A non-minority could be elected from the new one created, she said.

"I don't have a problem with a minority district. I oppose cutting and gutting me to do it," said Norton.

State Rep. John Bel Edwards, D-Amite, said eliminating the 30th black majority district

would run counter not only to Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 but recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings.

Edwards said a minority district can be drawn — the population is there and it is cohesive. He said not to allow the district would violate the rights of minorities to elect a representative of their choice as Section 2 requires.

Voting FOR the Seabaugh amendment to eliminate the 30th black majority district (57): Speaker Tucker and state Reps. B. Badon, Burford, Burns, H., T. Burns, Carmody, Carter, Champagne, Chandler, Chaney, Connick, Cortez, Cromer, Dove, Downs, Ellington, Fannin, Foil, Greene, Guinn, Harrison, Hazel, Henry, Hines, Hoffmann, Howard, Hutter, Katz, Kleckley, LaBruzzo, Lambert, Landry, Ligi, Little, Lopinto, Lorusso, McVea, Monica, Morris, Norton, Nowlin, Pearson, Ponti, Pope, Pugh, Richard, Richardson, Robideaux, Schroder, Seabaugh, Simon, Smiley, J. Smith, Talbot, Templet, White, and Willmott.

Voting AGAINST eliminating the 30th black majority district (46): Reps. Abramson, Anders, Armes, Arnold, Aubert, A. Badon, Baldone, Barras, Barrow, Billiot, Bishop, Brosett, Burrell, Danahay, Dixon, Doerge, Edwards, Franklin, Gallot, Geymann, Gisclair, Guillory, Hardy, Henderson, Hill, Honore, G. Jackson, M. Jackson, Johnson, R. Jones, S. Jones, LaFonta, LeBas, Leger, Montoucet, Moreno, Ritchie, Roy, G. Smith, P. Smith, St. Germain, Stiaes, Thibaut, Thierry, Williams and Wooton.